

Secretary of Defense, who says we should not do this.

We say, all right, that is \$48 billion. So what could we do with \$48 billion? Maybe we reduce the deficit, first of all, or, if you insist on spending it, did not want to do that, if it is not star wars, how about star schools? How about deciding kids are as important as bombers? Those are the priorities that we will debate next week.

No one in this country should lament the fact that we are going to have a debate. If we at the end of the day can maybe reach some understanding between all of us of what the right priorities are, what really advances America's interests, which investments make life worthwhile for all Americans, what expands opportunities in our country, if we can develop better understandings of what achieves all of that, then our country is better served, in my judgment.

I am not someone who believes the Republicans are all wrong and we are all right. That is simply not the case. All of us have made mistakes in this country. This country is blessed with people who make good decisions, Republicans and Democrats. And I hope at the end of this reconciliation fight we can find a way to create more of a bipartisan approach to addressing some of the wrenching, real problems we have.

I have often thought it would be useful, perhaps, for us to restrict ourselves someday, and it would be useful, probably, for talk radio, for example, to restrict themselves, maybe to have a day a month and talk about what is right with America, what is right with our country. Would that not be hard for some people because there are so many who are only willing to talk about what is wrong. The fact is, most people are coming here, not leaving. Can you think of someplace you would rather live? I cannot. This country is the best place in the world to live.

The question is, What is right with it? How do we build on what is right with it? I think it would be nice for talk radio and, I guess, the U.S. Senate from time to time to set aside a period and say, this is a period where we are going to talk about what works and what makes it work and how we build on that. And, I mean, maybe someday we can get to that kind of discussion, which I would also like to have.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Smith). The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank my colleague from North Dakota for his remarks. And I will pick up on his last point.

First of all, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended for 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WHERE IS THE STANDARD OF FAIRNESS?

Mr. WELLSTONE. Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate what the Senator from North Dakota said about our country. And I would say to my colleague who is presiding, the Presiding Officer, that I have said probably every week, when I go home, to someone that when I come to the floor of the Senate I still get goose bumps. It is a real honor to serve in the U.S. Senate and for Minnesota. If you look at these buildings here in Washington, DC, and you think about what they stand for—my father was a Jewish immigrant who fled persecution in Russia. It is a wonderful country, and we ought to emphasize the positive.

Mr. President, next week we will have debate—not hate, but rather a debate. And I would like to lay out my framework just for really not more than 10 minutes.

Mr. President, I came to the floor of the Senate at the beginning of this Congress, and I had a resolution. It was nothing more than a sense-of-the-Senate amendment that it was the sense of the Senate that we would not take any action that could create more hunger or homelessness among children. Actually, it was defeated twice. Then the third time it was passed by a voice vote. I now regret that I accepted a voice vote, because I think it was a symbolic vote, because if I look at this deficit reduction, the issue becomes deficit reduction based upon what standard? Is it deficit reduction based on the path of least political resistance? Are we asking some of the citizens to tighten their belts who cannot? And are we leaving a lot of special interests untouched? I think we are.

I certainly will be active in the debate next week with amendments to force some discussions on these issues, and I want to know where Senators stand.

We have something like \$35 billion slated for cuts in nutrition programs for children. Food stamps and the Women, Infants, and Children Program, the WIC Program, is an incredibly important program, because if you were to ask me as a former teacher what is the most important education program, I would say to make sure every woman who is expecting a child—I just had a grandson, our third grandchild, a week ago. That grandson, Joshua Paul, I think is going to have a good life. He was born healthy, but my daughter, Marcia, had an adequate diet. She had the resources to make sure she did.

My God, children at birth are not going to have the same chance if their mothers have not had a decent diet. We are cutting the Women, Infants, and Children Program.

The Food Stamp Program is not perfect; we ought to make it more accountable. The fact of the matter is, imperfections and all, we dramatically expanded the Food Stamp Program after the expose on hunger and mal-

nutrition in America, and we did it in the early 1970's. We had some national standards, and we implemented this program across the country. We do not have all the children anymore with distended bellies. We do not have the same amount of hunger and malnutrition, though we still have too much. We are cutting into these programs.

When it came to the Pentagon budget, which was \$7 billion more than the Pentagon asked, when it came to the military contractors, when it came to star wars or Stealth or Trident, we just gave the money away. They have the clout. They are the heavy hitters, they have the lobbyists, and they did just fine. But the children in America did not, especially poor children.

I just do not think there is a standard of fairness. I think there is consensus that you have to pay off the interest on the debt. That is what this is all about. There is not a Senator here that could be proud of the building up of the debt in this country. The question becomes, when you make the cuts and you do the deficit reduction, where is the Minnesota standard of fairness? That is the question.

Mr. President, the Finance Committee met and came out with \$245 billion of tax cuts. But here is the interesting thing. If you have family incomes below \$30,000 a year, which is about half the people in this country, you have the earned-income tax credit taken away from you and you pay more. You are paying a tax all the way up to families \$30,000 a year and under. But, by golly, if you are in the top 1 percent of this population with incomes over \$350,000 a year, you get a \$5,626 break. And if it is \$200,000 a year, you get \$3,416. This is a subsidy in inverse relationship to need.

If you are at the top of the population income-wise, the top 1 percent, you get a huge tax break. If you make over \$200,000 you do, and if you make over \$100,000 you do. But if you make under \$30,000 a year, you do not get any break; you pay more. This is like a subsidy in inverse relationship to need. Same issue.

This is what I am going to zero in on next week: Why have the military contractors got everything they wanted? Why do the children lose some of their nutritional programs? Who has the power in America? Who has power in the Congress? Special interests dominate.

Why does the top 1 percent of the population get a huge tax break and the bottom 50 percent of the population get an additional tax? Who has power? Who has the lobbyists? Who are the special interests? Who is well represented here? There is no Minnesota standard of fairness in this plan.

Finally, Mr. President, I have two other issues to mention. One is student financial aid. It is not coming up enough. I was a teacher for 20 years, and when we marked up the cuts in financial aid out of committee, I asked colleagues—and maybe they have done

this—but I said to colleagues, “Have you had any town meetings on your campuses? Because the picture you seem to have of students is not the same picture I get from holding community meetings back in my State”—Moorhead State, Inver Hills Community College, Minneapolis Community College, University of Minnesota at Duluth. Because what happens to me is fully half the students, if not more, come up to me and they say, either publicly or someone who is not good at speaking in a public meeting will come up afterwards and say, “Senator, I’m a nontraditional student.” That is the first sentence.

The next sentence, especially at the community colleges, is, “I am older than you”—they always like to say that—and I lost my job. I am going back to school. I don’t have the resources. Don’t cut the financial aid. I am a single parent. I am the welfare mother you say you want to go into workfare. Don’t cut my financial aid. Senator, we can’t afford it.”

Or if it is the 18-to-22-year-old group—many of our undergraduates are going to school 6 years, not 4 years and they have two and three minimum wage jobs and we are cutting financial aid for students. And then, Mr. President, there are the students who sell plasma to buy textbooks to begin the semester.

What in the world are we doing ending the grace period on the interest on loans 6 months after graduation? Why are we ending the parent plus loan program for moderate- and middle-income families? Why are we putting a tax on the institutions based on their loan portfolio? Why do we not understand that 75 percent of the student financial aid package are loans now, not grants? What in the world are we thinking?

The missing piece here is the impact on people. I have held these town meetings on campuses. I do not know, maybe other Senators have gotten a different picture from students, but that is the picture I get.

So, again, \$245 billion of tax cuts, but cuts in students financial aid; \$7 billion more than the Pentagon wants, but cuts in student financial aid.

Mr. President, I am not talking about Medicare and Medicaid and health care today, but I will tell you this, this is a rush to recklessness and it will not work in my State of Minnesota. We have done something of which I am proud. We have 300,000 children that receive medical assistance. It is a safety net program. Is that going to be cut?

I meet with people from the developmental disabilities community, and I have people say to me—I remember a woman in another town meeting. Are we holding town meetings? Are we talking to people back in the States that are going to be affected by this? She says to me—and this Chair is a close friend of mine, I respect the Chair, the Senator from New Hampshire—she says to me, “PAUL, the

Americans With Disabilities Act is going to be a cruel lie for me if I don’t have someone to help me get out of bed in the morning, a personal attendant. I can’t go and own my own small business, and I do own my own small business. I am intelligent and I am smart and I live a life of dignity. Do you know what you are doing with cuts in medical assistance? Are you going to restrict eligibility, less access to personal attendants? Are we going to have to be poor to be eligible for any of this? What are you doing? That is the question. Don’t be so reckless with our lives.”

I hear the same thing in rural Minnesota. I could go on and on, Mr. President. But the question I have, by way of summary, because I do not want to dominate the floor today, is why, if we are going to do deficit reduction, not do it based on some standard of Minnesota fairness? Why do we have a disproportionate number of cuts that affect the most vulnerable citizens in this country, the poor, namely women and children? Why are we cutting financial aid for higher education? Why are we cutting into health care and the quality of health care that is delivered to people?

I am willing to argue this issue of quality later on for 20 hours plus in terms of what this is going to do for Medicare and medical assistance. But at the same time, Mr. President, you have the tax cuts that mainly go to people on the top. You have more than the Pentagon asked for. And then, finally, and this is going to be the piece that I am looking most forward to in this debate, what about all of the subsidies that go to the oil companies and the tobacco companies and the pharmaceutical companies and the insurance companies? What about all those loopholes in deductions and giveaways?

I will tell you something. I think what makes people more angry about the political process in the Nation’s Capital is the feeling that some of these special interests who are the heavy hitters and hire the lobbyists and are the big players and the big givers get their way.

This is a perfect example. I am going to come out here on the floor and I am going to say—and we are going to have votes on these amendments—if you want to have deficit reduction, why do you not ask some of these large corporations that get tax giveaways to tighten their belts? Should they not be a part of deficit reduction? You know what? Every time you do that, all sorts of colleagues think of a million reasons why we should continue to give them special tax breaks. Middle-income people do not get these breaks; working people do not get these breaks; low-income people do not get these breaks. But, oh, boy, oil companies do, pharmaceutical companies do, gas companies do, coal companies do, tobacco companies do. They all get these breaks.

So I think the debate next week ought to be about, where is the standard of fairness? Who is being well represented and who is not being well represented?

We will have a sharp debate, I say to my colleague from Georgia. It will not be hate, it will be debate, because I believe all of us have mutual respect for one another. We feel strongly about what we are doing, and I am sure we are all doing it in good faith. But I have a lot of indignation about the priorities of this deficit reduction plan. I believe it goes against the grain of the basic Minnesota standard of fairness.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COVERDELL addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COVERDELL. I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended for another 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I think everybody would acknowledge that we are entering a very historical moment in America’s history, certainly in the context of the Congress of the United States, because we are, over the next 4 to 6 weeks, going to be making decisions—very significant decisions—about the way the American people are governed.

Of course, I always appreciate the remarks of my colleague from Minnesota. But it is almost as if he has forgotten that a new Congress was sent here this past November, and with startling results. The Congress was not sent here by any large corporation. This new majority was sent here by an overwhelming pronouncement by the American people—all these folks he is talking about, such as the workers, who said, “We want something different done in Washington,” and families, saying, “We do not like what is happening in Washington.” In overwhelming numbers, Americans went to the polls and said, “We want things in Washington to change.”

Every speech I hear from the other side of the aisle, including from the President and the administration, is saying, “Leave everything the way it is, it is just fine.” Every time you try to change it, we come out with some new class of evil Americans who try to frighten America from the change that has to be made.

Let us talk about the President for a moment or two. When the President ran for President in 1992, he promised the American people, “I will give you a balanced budget in 5 years.” Well, he has been here for a little over 2 years now, and he has not given us a balanced budget in 5 years, in 7 years, in 10 years, in no years. Why did he make